



Aug. 15, 2014

Chief Thomas Jackson
Ferguson Police Department
222 S. Florissant Road
Ferguson, MO 63135

Mayor James Knowles
Ferguson City Hall
110 Church St.
Ferguson, MO 63135

Dear Chief Jackson and Mayor Knowles:

As the nation's largest union of journalists, including a large unit of St. Louis Post-Dispatch employees, we are writing to express our deep concern about how your city's police officers have treated journalists covering the protests in Ferguson. We would like to meet with you to discuss strategies to prevent a repeat of these incidents.

On Wednesday, Aug. 13, two journalists were arrested, despite clearly identifying themselves and their news organizations (The Washington Post and Huffington Post), and a crew from Al Jazeera America appears to have been targeted with tear gas and rubber bullets. Other journalists also have reported unnecessarily confrontational behavior by officers.

News reporters and photographers have the First Amendment right to record and photograph these very public events. Detaining journalists, jailing them, targeting them or interfering with their work is an unacceptable violation of their rights and responsibilities. Our members cannot do their work in handcuffs or holding cells.

We understand that large protests can be chaotic situations for officers, who must make rapid decisions to protect themselves and public safety. In other cities, including Oakland, Calif., we have successfully worked with police and city leaders to identify policies that protect journalists without compromising officer safety. We urge you to enact one such measure immediately: To instruct all local officers and those brought in for mutual aid to immediately call in a supervising officer in any conflict situation in which someone identifies as a working journalist. A PIO or supervising officer can assess the validity of the claim, and you will have avoided an embarrassing and unconstitutional detainment.

We want to work with you to find solutions. We request that you contact us as soon as possible to arrange a time to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,

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